

DBULLETIN

The Coalition Government's Plans: Housing Management Implications for Housing Associations and Local Authorities

Following the formation of the coalition government, this Bulletin summarises some of the new government's proposed "headline" policies which will affect housing associations and local authorities in the provision and management of social housing. Further Bulletins will be issued when the details of the policies become clearer.

Housing and Local Government

- Introduce a Decentralisation and Localism Bill. The purpose of this Bill is to devolve greater powers to local authorities and neighbourhoods and give local communities control over housing and planning decisions;
- Local government and community groups will be given greater financial autonomy and the coalition government has indicated that it intends to progress a review of local government finance and that the ring-fencing of grants would be phased out;
- The Housing Revenue Account is to be reviewed;
- Home Improvement Packs will be abolished but for the requirement that an energy performance certificate be provided to prospective buyers when the property goes on the market;
- Ban the use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) by local authorities, unless they have been approved by a Magistrate on application by the Local Authority and they have been able to demonstrate to the court that the powers are necessary for curbing serious crime;
- Provide more protection against aggressive bailiffs and unreasonable charging orders and ensure that courts have the power to insist that repossession is always a last resort;
- Ban orders for sale on unsecured debts of less than £25,000;

- Promote shared ownership schemes and help social tenants and others to own or part own their home;
- Promote "home on the farm" schemes to encourage farmers to convert existing buildings into affordable housing;
- Local authorities will be given incentives to deliver sustainable developments, including the building of new homes; and
- Social tenants will be permitted to start up businesses in their own homes. This proposal may require tenancy agreements to be varied as well as existing policies on tackling anti-social behaviour.

Crime and Policing

- Reform the Criminal Justice System and give police forces greater freedom from government control so that they are best able to deal with crime and anti-social behaviour;
- Ban the sale of alcohol below cost price and review alcohol taxation and pricing to ensure it tackles binge drinking without unfairly penalising responsible drinkers, pubs and important local industries;
- Overhaul the Licensing Act to give local authorities and the police stronger powers to remove licences from, or refuse to grant licences to, any premises that are causing problems and also allow local authorities

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and the police to shut down permanently any shop or bar found to be persistently selling alcohol to children. These proposals are likely to require applications made to the Magistrates court; and

- Double the maximum fine for under age alcohol sales to £20,000 and permit local authorities to charge more for late night licences to pay for additional policing.

Justice

Explore alternative forms of secure, treatment-based accommodation for mentally ill and drug offenders;

Carry out a fundamental review of legal aid to make sure it works more efficiently; and

Introduce effective measures to tackle anti-social behaviour and low level crime, including forms of restorative justice such as Neighbourhood Justice Panels where the offender comes face to face with a victim in order to account for his/her conduct.

If you have any queries or would like advice on how this will affect your business, please contact Nick Billingham or Jonathan Hulley or another member of the Housing Management Team with whom you usually deal.



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